



The Meshan Saga

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NOTE: Member emails were removed in this re-release edition for various reasons (privacy, changes etc).

NZ No.	Name	Interests
001	Martin Rait	Publishing, kibbitzing & Meshan work
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004	Malcolm Harbrow	Gearheading w/ FF&S; developing the New Era; possible player
006	Gary Ammundsen	Developing a low tech world, playing casual games
007	Michael Kerse	Playing action oriented games

This is a re-release edition with certain updated contact information, copyright declarations, etc. It has been transitioned to modern design software to keep this publication edition alive for the community after nearly two decades of absence. Not all editions will be returned to market in their original form, due to copyright withdrawal by a particular contributor. Some email/web link details in this publication may no longer be relevant and active. They are provided here for historical reference purposes only.

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HIWG supports the usage of Game Designer's Workshop (GDW), Imperium Games Traveller and Steve Jackson Games oriented product usage. The group has a large array of alternative and supporting material for use with Traveller, Megatraveller, Traveller: The New Era (TNE), T4 and Gurps Traveller.

If you would like to become a member or just want to get involved with other Traveller's then contact the New Zealand branch of HIWG.

HIWG New Zealand's mission is to:

- Free membership of the New Zealand organisation
- Maintain a database of contact details of all members in New Zealand.
- Maintain a database of all internet based resources for member use.
- Aid members to publish material if they lack the resources to do so.
- Distribute material received from overseas to local members.
- Aid members in subscribing to SIGs, Fanzines etc.
- Converting New Zealand writer's material into PDF format for easy archiving and international distribution.
- Maintain a data warehouse of various Traveller electronic documents.
- Foster Traveller's profile at New Zealand based conventions etc.
- Distribute an electronic newsletter relevant to New Zealand.

Membership to HIWG NZ is free.

HIWG Internet Resources

HIWG MAILING LISTS

List 1

message to Majordomo@fwe.com with the following
in the message body:
subscribe hiwg <youraddress>

List 2

message to Majordomo@qrc.com with the following
in the message body:
subscribe hiwg <youraddress>
OR
subscribe hiwg-digest <youraddress>

MAILING LISTS

TNE-RCES: tne-rces@tower.ml.org
ISBA2: isba@oasis.leo.org
ISBA: isba@goldinc.com
(for next few months)

WEB SITES

Imperium Games

<http://www.imperiumgames.com>

HIWG Australia Site

<http://dove.net.au/~grants/hiwg.html>

Roger Myhre's web site

<http://home.sn.no/~starwolf/HIWG>

Bryan Borich's web site

<Http://members.aol.com/kagekiha/traveller>

Free Trader BEOWULF Home Page.

<http://www.ice.net/~kwalsh/trav2.html>

Jeff Zeitlin's Page.

<http://www1.execnet.com/~jeffz/traveler>

Traveller History page

<http://www.ultranet.com/~eclipse/SV/TRAV/travhist.html>

The BARD library, for TNE

<http://www.chara.gsu.edu/~lewis/whatnew.html>

Harold Hale's Children Of Earth for TNE

<http://dopey.siscom.net/~hdhale/COE.htm>

Freelance Traveller EZine

<http://www.dragonfire.net/~FreelanceTraveller/>

Traveller library data

<http://www.pcug.org.au/~davidjw/>

Goeran's Traveller page

<http://enterprise.shv.hb.se/~goeran/traveller/>

Joseph F Heck

<http://www.missouri.edu/~ccjoe/traveller/>

Leroy Guatney

<http://ouray.cudenver.edu/~lwlguatn/index.html>

<ftp://ftp.mpgn.com/Gaming/Traveller/>

Non-Traveller Sites (but have some relevance)

<http://www.webrpg.com/>

NET RPG for Macs

<ftp://mirror.aol.com/pub/info-mac/comm/tcp/net-rpg-302.hqx>

Melbourne Times & Earth Colonies Web Site:

<http://gwis2.circ.gwu.edu/~david/Melbourne>

Role-Playing Games Internet Resource Guide

http://www.common.net/~shadow/rpg_index/index.html

Space Art- Novagraphics

<http://www.novaspace.com>

<http://ftp.funet.fi/pub/doc/games/roleplay/programs>

Meshan Scenario Concepts - Virus Discussion

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Virus 'Ecology' & The New Sentient Order Of The Universe?

Introduction

This document has come about after discussions concerning the nature of the virus with R.F. (245). We came across a number of stumbling blocks in developing Meshan sector with virus effects.

Document 245.1 (page 6-7 - since removed) details R.F.'s concerns with scenario specific virus problems he faces. This has arisen due to a lack of information concerning the nature of the virus and how it operates.

In this document I intend to look at the nature of the virus from published material. After that I will outline some possibilities for the virus and their implications for the Traveller universe.

Many of the points I will raise will need clarification by GDW.

Nature of the Virus

The virus has its origins as a modified Cymbeline chip for use in Imperial transponder systems. Transponder chips imprinted information on each other via radio communications. This imprinting was a means of verifying ship identity.

The initial virus was a modified transponder chip which was designed to imprint specific programming onto other transponder chips. So at first the virus was based in transponder chips.

However the virus code was designed to generate an encrypted code 'seed' that expanded to take over computer systems attached to the transponder system. At this point the virus has moved to become a pure 'data' entity.

As a data entity it can infect non-cymbeline based systems using data 'seeds' that spread until they can find a large enough system to grow into an active virus.

An active virus is transformed by the system in which it resides. Therefore virus evolution can result from the system they inhabit. Evolution can also occur due to corruption of data. Evolution via intelligent decisions can also be done. A virus can tailor its seeds deliberately. An example of this is the 1A "Suicide Inducer" which has remained alive and releases strain 1 "Suicides" instead of duplicates of itself.

For a 'seed' to spread the carrier requires enough memory/storage space to contain it. To expand and become active a 'seed' needs to inhabit a system with enough processing power (typically parallel) and sufficient memory/storage space.

Assumption

The virus is a data based entity. This means that it requires memory/storage space to inhabit. Because of the nature of mass parallel machines, enough memory would normally be present. This assumption should fit with the many small electronic devices that have been stated as being too 'dumb' to host a virus.

Virus Capabilities

The modern data entity based virus depends on the system it inhabits for its abilities. Starships provide mobility, weapons and communication abilities. Robots provide human scale mobility and operations. As shown in *Smash & Grab* a virus has gained psionics in a specific computer system. Because the nature of the virus is data based a 'psionic' virus cannot have 'psionic' children, unless they inhabit psionic capable systems.

Dealing with the Virus

As detailed already the most common method of dealing with the virus is by isolating computer systems from each other, and using humans for inter-machine communications. This is meant to stop infections.

The other method involves making 'dumb' machines which the virus is unable to inhabit. This would be common for machines in communications systems.

A brute force method involves electrical overloading, or stripping out virus inhabited components. More complex anti-viral systems are obviously being developed by the Regency and the Hivers using tailored virus systems.

A good approach to stop virus control of peripheral devices is to have hardwired circuitry with the instructions on ROM (ie read only) systems. It is conceivable that many devices that control vital systems will use ROM based operations. For instance a life support system could be run by a computer using ROM based operating parameters. Using limited processing power and pregenerated situational instructions will mean the system is immune to virus infection.

Another possibility related to using a tailored virus could also be used. Since the virus is a self-aware data entity it is similar to TL 17 AI machines. A non-virus based AI entity could be used to counter the virus. The implications of the virus facing an opponent in computer-space is quite appealing. Could a neural linked human with virus proof computer enhancements battle the virus in computer(cyber)-space?

A recorded human consciousness operating in a machine could also be interesting. This is similar to the human derived entity taking on a Berserker machine in Larry Niven's story '*A Teardrop Falls*' which is set in Fred Saberhagen's Berserker universe. Can a lower tech synthetic computer entity (the traditional concept of a computer virus) be used in anti-virus operations? The possibilities on this front are interesting and need answering by GDW.

New Environments for Virus?

Apart from smart computer systems there is another environment with the same sorts of characteristics and is just as numerous. This other environment is organic intelligences.

This area of virus discussion becomes the most scary for the Traveller setting. What happens if the virus takes over people?

Firstly the virus needs to get into an organic brain in a coherent functional manner. Two methods seem possible for this move into a new environment. Cybernetic neural links provide a direct link into a beings' mind via the sensory neural pathways. The machinery inbetween the the jack and the computer is a translation device. The translator turns computer generated data into organic sensory data. Since jacks are often used for VR (virtual reality) links for remote piloting, simulations or external sensor feeds, the jack can receive a variety of data. Jacks are also often used to send data/instructions from the person to the computer. Essentially the neural jack is an electronic I/O bus on an organic being.

The other method involves psionics. If Droyne have the ability to conduct 'train' and 'forgetfulness' under

telepathy it might be possible for a virus to inhabit a machine in which it can use similar psionic talents. With such talents a virus could implant a seed into a person's mind. Psionic possession by humans has been published a couple of times (namely a DGP Digest adventure). Virus possession of organics could also be a possibility.

This transfer to an organic mind might seem like an interesting scenario idea. However I would raise a flag of caution against this. If it can be done once it can happen again. Since there are alliance builders, group minds and virus's with huge automated facilities out there it would be quite possible for them to mass manufacture 'Viral Organics'.

Does GDW want a Borg type civilisation appearing where a race of humans springs up with mental virus infections? Can the horror of young babies being neural jacked and virus impregnated be tolerated? Can mass planetary conversions be viewed as the natural evolution of sentient species? No, I don't think so.

Conclusion

GDW must answer these questions and define the limitations of the virus. The material on the virus that has been published is sufficient for the users of the game. However if HIWG members are going to do developments which are consistent with GDW then the law must be stated concerning the virus. Facts and figures are required, not vague statements.

The very existence of the Traveller universe is threatened by the virus. GDW need to respond to save the day. Otherwise I'm going to write this 'viral organic' horror up for Meshan sector. It might fit the black curtain better though.

So, GDW what do you think? If you like these concepts, I'd like a hand in it. If you don't like the implications then I suggest you outline limitations with some coherent reasons backing them up.

Postscript

With the release of Vampire Fleets, it has become abundantly clear that the virus is dominantly a hardware entity, relying on cymbeline derived designs for mobility and seeding new 'hardware' virus chips. However sentience isn't realised without a mass parrallel processing environment with plenty of storage/memory.

However I still think it quite valid that the virus can be a data entity, since a data construct can match a hardware architecture. In a multipurpose processing environment inherent in big computers the virus could be just a data entity. Obviously making smaller constructs such as robots into sentient machines would require hardware reconfiguration via cymbeline modelled chips.

Serkur - The New Estates Computer Virus

The Concept

The following is a set of notes about the computer Virus in the Newstates control computer.

The computer is a main control center of the Rhyllorian government's (Planet Serkur) new Estates project - a project designed to turn desert wasteland in the far east of that country (near the Karlor border) into fertile agricultural land. This is a de-desertification project, not a terraforming project.

The Newstates project was the brainchild of the Rhyllorian government engineer Vladros Rammanos who spent nearly 20 years developing the systems that would operate and maintain this project. Rammanos, unfortunately had a nasty accident a few weeks prior to the system going on-line and then mysteriously disappeared.

Early History of the Project

20 years prior to the project going on-line, a Kisiidi ship (TL-9) mysteriously vanished in the Arena Subsector. The ship was probably a 400ton Anvil class explorer. The ship crashed onto the Planet Serkur and was half buried in sanddunes near where the Newstates project was to take place.

The timing of the crash was at a stage where the Serkur inhabitants were sufficiently advanced to have a go at understanding the technology onboard.

The ship visited a mine site prior to crashing where it was boarded by a robot infected by a co-operative strain of the Hobbyist virus. The ship then crashed delivering its technology and a seed containing the virus to Serkur.

It is interesting to note that the Isiidi (citizens of Kisiidi) use neural jack technology. Their TL 9 computers are very ROM based interfacing with human brains on the other end. This technology was subsequently carefully examined by the Rhyllorian technical staff working on the project.

What is the Nature of the Virus

Firstly, getting baset of the mysterious disappearance of Vladros Rammanos, after his crash he was effectively a quadraplegic. It was then quickly decided that his brain would be used as a part of the processing facility of the computer. The body was still attached to the brain and the computer interacted via neural jacks. His body is fed by IV's. The world regarded him as dead, however he could still contribute to his work in this new form.

The computer was devised from many years research on the Kisiidi ship, and special work was done on the Virus (effectively an attempt at "Genetic Engineering" on the Virus) to alter it so that it could be used in running the computer. This was always considered to be very risky and very special precautions were taken.

These parameters are known about the virus:

- The computer became sentient after going on-line
- The Virus is a data-entity (?) - it cannot recognise hardware
- The Virus is a mutant co-operative version of the Hobbyist strain. It sees itself as co-operating with this brain
- The virus inhabits the computer and takes on the personality of Vladios making this computer sentient
- It is a constructive use of the Hobbyist strain ie: it is interested in running the operation as an experiment in "greening" the desert.
- The human brain enhances the decision making of the computer- something that computers traditionally have difficulty in doing, thus combining the best of both worlds.

The virus is used to co-operating with other entities (virus) on working on problems, so it will be able to interact with the human brain.

Also note (and this must be stressed), that this computer is contained with no interaction from the outside. There is very tight security present. It is well known, even to Rhyllorians of the nature of how viruses can seed eggs, that many then spread into other systems. Special procedures are in place to isolate the computer so that viruses can't get out. No electronic media is allowed out of the complex (including data transmission).

One point that needs to be considered is, is the virus a data entity only, or can it reconfigure hardware (eg: overprint it's own circuitry on chips). If it can, then this opens up many possibilities and a pandora's box.

Aaron Barlow © 1994



Serkur & the Virus

Kisiidi Vessel

The Kisiidi vessel which was surveying Arena Subsector in 1180 would have been TL-9 and would have had a mixed Human/Droyne crew. While surveying a reasonably high tech Vargr world (Richard's Virus Community), they were boarded by hostile robots.

These robots were designed as insertion combat units for taking hold of the ship. Each acted as a carrier for a virus seed to be inserted into the ship's computer systems. Because of some of the Kisiidi precautions they managed to escape and then jump but not without internal infection.

When they arrived in the Serkur system the infection would have crippled drives and power thus forcing the ship into a crash. The result would be a non-functional vessel with extensive damage. The ship would not hold an active virus, but one of the 'injected' virus seeds.

The locals would be able to piece together technology from analysis to build crude versions of it's electronics (TL 8 instead of 9) and the neural jack technology. At the same time the seed would be inadvertantly transfered to the computer based on the Kisiidi electronics.

Knowledge of Virus Problems

Phil has proposed that the Locals know all about the Virus and every precaution to contain it as well as detecting the virus seed in the remains of the Kisiidi vessel. It must be asked how they know all this?

During the crash when the virus first hit this world was tech level 4 and had no ability to comprehend how software constructs and hardware for electronic devices are supposed to work. Only the Vargr overlords knew but were wiped out. Crash effects to Serkur were the result of loss of interstellar contact and trade.

Since the virus hit and the arrival of the Kisiidi vessel no other interstellar contact is shown. So where did the Serkurians learn all this advanced anti-virus information? Certainly not even the Kisiidi at the time knew enough to protect themselves even when they had consistant dealings with the virus and were higher tech at the time.

Tailoring the Virus

Phil goes even further to explain how the virus was modified by the locals to suit their purposes. This is an outstanding feat. One that has only been duplicated by the Regency/Domain and the Hiver Federation with their TL16+ computer technology. How does a TL 7 world with some junked TL 9 manage something that a TL 12+ might only start the rudiments of experimentation on.

My personal opinion is that this concept goes beyond the bounds of the technology and resources available to this world, even the sector. It must be remembered that this sector was only ever TL 14 at best with all these destroyed bar the world on which the Fascists have their capital.

Moderated Approach

I don't believe the approach taken with the virus in the write up will work. The locals don't need to be aware of the virus. The outline below is easier and more believable.

After studying the Kisiidi ship the government decides to use the salvaged technology and usable components in constructing a more advanced computer. Since the technology could prove to be unreliable they use it on a non-strategic project, ie the Newstates. To help ensure that opposing governments or subversive elements don't get the technology they have a complete security blanket with the listed procedures. Afterall imagine what would be done with a UFO on Earth today.

The prototype computer uses Serkurian components, hybridised components based on analyse of Kisiidi parts and usable salvaged parts. Because of this the virus seed is in the system in one of the salvaged parts. The locals aren't aware of the virus since it has done nothing since the computer isn't on-line and has only gone through test procedures.

With the crippling of the engineer he is neural jacked and hooked to the system with a number of design changes.

The switch is flicked and the system is on-line. A period of time is given to get it operating simulations for the project.

During this period the computer becomes sentient. This is attributed to the synthesis of the new parallel architecture with the synaptic responses of the human brain. Soon it takes on some of the personality traits of the engineer. Thus no one suspects a virus. Any glitch is attributed to disparities in man-machine interfacing.

However the real story is that the virus has slowly built itself up at the same time the engineer comes to grapple with his new environment. The two entities communicate and take on various of each others traits while they gain mastery of the system. When both reach maturity they respect each others space and work together on their common interest. The virus has developed this interest due to it's nature (hobbyist) and the environment it grew up in. ie the data hooked to the machine, it's initial programs and the engineers thought patterns. Glitches would occur only when the two entities had a difference of opinion and couldn't agree on a result.

Thus we have achieved the tailored result without the locals having knowledge and abilities beyond reason. This also lets more intrigue occur about the virus and brings it to be an ultimate threat if were ever to escape. Given the superb performance of this system, the government will keep it tightly under security until it can be perfected, tested and evaluated for making more for military purposes.

MESHAN SECTOR Library Data

New Era

Library Data Additional 2/1200

Prepared by Union Information Services Rigger

Date: 1200 imperial

Digar

Loc: 1838

1110 UPP: CA95114-8 M Lo Ni

1200 UPP: DA95100-7 Lo Ni Ow:1839

This world seems to have only been settled as a military base prior to the civil war. With the crash the personnel were stranded, and were forced to rely their own resources and skills to exist. When contacted by Gutu the locals jumped at the chance of aid, and are effectively controlled by Gutu. Given low population, the government of Gutu is likely to send a few thousand settlers over the space of several years to help develop the world.

Gutu

Loc: 1839

1110 UPP: B879ABD-A Hi In

1200 UPP: C879A56-9 Hi In

This human world has managed to rebuild much of it's lost technology infrastructure that it lost during the virus induced crash. Prior to the imperial civil war it had been an Imperial Client State that barely retained it's autonomy from Vargr control through a highly repressive government. In modern times the world is more open to it's citizens, instead encouraging them into many industries and activities that the world had never developed due to an abundance of offworld goods.

Gutu has used a small flotilla of salvaged vessels to again explore space. Given it's overall strength, it is trying to exert control on it's neighbours, and has some limited succes, namely at Digar.

Gutu has had limited dealings with Isiidi traders probing rimward. However the government of Gutu has been rather reserved, especially given their misgivings at dealing with Vargr, and the Isiidi's association with them.

Gzoekogh

Loc: 0811

1110 UPP: E655855-3 C

1200 UPP: X65588A-3 BALK

Gzoekogh has been briefly visited by AES Esocorde Thiritk on long range survey of known precrash centers of high technology. The world has splintered from a united world government into a number of imperialistic functions. It's current political scene seems similar to those equating to Terran records (TSS Kermadec) of the Victorian era on Earth.

The world has one major empire, 4 minor empires and 30-50 independant kingdoms of various sizes. Technology is around 1880AD equivalent.

Ungzoenogzkhe

Corsair band operating in Meshan sector around 1110 imperial. [Robots, p. 17]

Uloer

Loc: 0906

1110 UPP: C488676-8 Ag Ni

1200 UPP: X488513-1 BALK

Uloer was briefly visited by AES Esocorde Thiritk. The surevy team found this world to incredible hostile, especially to non-humans. It has regressed to a feudal society with humans dominating the civilised regions of the world. Vargr are warned to avoid this world, as they are hunted for sport by the human feudal lords. Technologic devices and in particular energy weapons are highly regarded as some kind of magic. Most of the feudal lords foster a priesthood of psionics, that wield 'magic', namely psionic powers in the defense of their lord's domain.

AES has posted this world as a traditional red zone and advise any survey groups to use extreme caution, and be accompanied by highly skilled telepaths and take appropriate anti-psionic measures.

Vaerzaukhu

Loc 0206

1110 UPP salvaged from pre-virus vessel: B463773-B C

[TS2, p9]



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T4 Ship Design: Ritestar II

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